



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WSDA set to begin spraying to eradicate gypsy moths

OLYMPIA – The state Department of Agriculture plans to conduct ground-spraying operations on 102 properties in Seattle's Crown Hill neighborhood to eradicate European gypsy moths today (May 2), weather permitting. Officials expect the first aerial treatment of 560 acres in Vader, Lewis County, next week. Two additional treatments, one to two weeks apart, will follow the first treatments.

Completion of environmental assessments and favorable rulings by superior court judges in King and Lewis counties in April have cleared the way for the insecticide treatments against the gypsy moths.

At issue during the court hearings was whether the state Department of Agriculture could spray an insecticide on trees and shrubs on private property to eliminate infestations of gypsy moths after homeowners had denied them permission to enter the property.

On April 19, David Draper, Lewis County Superior Court judge, ruled that the department could treat the property of the single owner in Vader who did not give consent. Consent was given by the other 201 Vader residents. On April 25, James Doerty, King County Superior Court judge, ruled the same way regarding 38 properties in Crown Hill. Some 65 property owners in Crown Hill have given voluntary consent to the treatments.

State agriculture officials were pleased with the court decisions.

"That enables us to continue keeping the gypsy moth from becoming established in our state," said Dr. Clinton Campbell, the department's Pest Program manager. "The gypsy moth is one of the worst forest pests ever brought to America. And once the gypsy moth becomes established, you cannot get rid of it."

The gypsy moth ravages thousands of acres in the U.S. every year by destroying trees, destroying habitats, reducing water quality, and reducing the aesthetic value of yards, parks and recreation areas. The best time to eradicate the moth is immediately after it hatches as a caterpillar in late April or early May and begins feeding on leaves.

Since the gypsy moth was first detected in Washington state in 1974, WSDA has eradicated all identified infestations. Seventy-one treatments have been applied over the years, 54 by ground and 17 by air.

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During the King County hearing, opponents argued that the proposed treatment on 16.5 acres was overkill; that other alternatives were just as effective as Foray 48B; and insufficient health studies had been conducted on Foray 48B. The department countered each allegation, arguing:

- The best time to treat infestations is when they are small.
- The non-insecticide alternatives being proposed by opponents would not eradicate the moth – only reduce its population or slow its spread.
- *Btk* (*Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki*) has an excellent safety record according to the Environmental Protection Agency, Washington State Department of Health, and Public Health – Seattle and King County.

In an affidavit presented at the King County hearing, Barbara Morrissey, a toxicologist with the state Department of Health, said, "The Department of Health concludes that it is extremely unlikely that application of Foray 48B will cause infection."

Regarding the inert ingredients of the insecticide which cannot be made public by state law but which Morrissey has reviewed, she said, "There is no significant toxicity of the other ingredients, at the levels present."

"It is possible that individuals with a history of severe allergies to foods or food additives could react to the spray, although several large health surveillance studies have not observed measurable increases in serious allergic reactions following spraying with Foray 48B," Morrissey added.

As a common sense precaution, health officials recommend people minimize their exposure to the treatment, stay inside for 30 minutes to allow the insecticide to dry, and wash with soap and water if they come into contact with the spray.

The gypsy moth is permanently established in 18 states in the eastern United States.

The Department of Agriculture is the principal state agency charged by the Legislature with protecting people, agriculture and the environment from exotic and invasive pests. Among the major destructive insect invaders the department monitors besides gypsy moths are apple maggot, Asian and citrus longhorned beetles, Japanese beetle, and cereal leaf beetle.

For updated information on the agency's program to eradicate gypsy moth, including an environmental assessment of spraying operations, go to www.wa.gov/agr/gypsy.htm.